

From the Weston Historical Society archives...

My Life in Weston Village (1935 to 1945). Part 1

by Jean Gove-Carbone

In the 1930s, Weston was a very quiet and conservative small town. Going north from downtown, the railway overpass near St Phillip's Road loosely marked the northern town limit; beyond the overpass were some industrial sites (such as Massey Harris, a farm equipment manufacturer) and sparse housing, but that was all. To the east, Jane Street marked another loose boundary, and on the opposite



A postcard image of Weston's southernmost limit, c. 1940. Note the parallel street car tracks on Main Street (now Weston Road).

side of town from Jane Street was the natural boundary of the Humber River. Going south, one eventually encountered the neighboring community of Mount Dennis, and then onward to the Junction (Toronto).

I have a number of memories of this time period in which I grew up. One is of the composition of Weston. Most of the Westonites we knew had their origins in England and Scotland. Very few newcomers arrived and few people moved away, and I don't recall any diversity in ethnicity. It was a very homogenous town, and most everyone had lived in Weston for decades.

Getting around Weston in the Thirties was by streetcar, bicycle, or on foot. Streetcars ran north from the Junction, through Mount Dennis, through the Weston business district, and onward to the north end of town by St Phillips Road. The fare for kids was 3 cents. The streetcar seats, bottoms and back rests, were made of wooden slats with an inch of space between them. They were durable and resisted signs of wear. They were varnished for easy sliding in and out. Through the business district of Weston, the tracks were laid double, in parallel, but around the area of the theatre, the tracks became single in order that

one streetcar might travel north to the St. Phillips Road overpass. As the streetcars had controls at both ends, the operator simply moved to the other end



A Weston Streetcar, c. 1930. This image was taken just south of the intersection of Main and John Streets.

of the car when he was ready to head back in the other direction; no turntable for the streetcar was necessary. When the streetcar arrived back at the theatre, another car was waiting on the double section of the track to begin the north run again.

Weston Town Hall was located on the corner of Main Street and Little Avenue. It was an old red brick building and it had a very tall bell tower. The bell was rung daily at noon, and when it rang, all over town, people would glance at their watches and clocks to check the time, a long-established habit. The Town Hall building had two floors; the main floor was where town business was conducted, while the second floor was a large open room for meetings. The second floor was large enough that the Weston town band practiced there every Wednesday evening.

I remember this detail as my brother Gib was a band member and had to leave directly from the dinner table every Wednesday to make it to practice. To reach the second floor of the Town Hall, there was a stairway going up at the front of the building, just to the right of the main door. In the back of the building, there was a secure area to be used if someone had to be locked up, but this was not a common occurrence as Weston was very peaceful and was almost entirely crime free. In my 18 years of living in Weston before going to nursing school, I can remember only one serious event; the rest were all seemingly minor misdemeanors. Outside the Town Hall, in front, was a very large drinking fountain. It was made out of concrete and the base was raised above the sidewalk level. There were two small steps to enable children to reach the water. I very much liked this fountain and often stopped for a drink when I was going by. It was

a very sad day when the Town Hall and its fountain were demolished. The Town Hall represented Weston. It was its heart. It was a tremendous loss.

Married women did not work outside of their homes prior to WWII. There were, however, two ladies who were available to assist patrons in the Weston Public Library, which is on the corner of King and Main Streets. Young women worked as school teachers or sales clerks. Eaton's and Simpsons were giant department stores of that time, and many from Weston made the trek into Toronto to work there. Most men in Weston either walked to their place of employment or took the streetcar. Many worked in factories like the CCM (which made bicycles), Kodak, or Moffat's to name but a few.



This early image of Weston Town Hall shows the drinking fountain that was a favourite with thirsty children.

Gas stations gave A+ service in those days. There were not many of them around. I remember only one in Weston, Cruickshank's Garage on Main Street near the theatre. Gas stations in the Thirties were a far cry from those of today. When a car pulled in, three young fellows would come running out of the office to assist. They would be clean, have nice haircuts, and would be wearing the same colored uniform shirts with the gas logo on the front. They would check under the hood, check the pressure in all four tires, carefully clean the windshield and then pump the gas.

It seems that the amount of snowfall in the Thirties was much more than what we get in the present time. Really cold weather started in early October and often lasted until May. As a grade-schooler, I remember that Main Street would be regularly plowed after the first snowfall and that huge piles of snow would accumulate at the sides of the road; the piles were so high that I could not see the cars that were driving past on the other side of these snow walls - I could only hear them! At intervals, a narrow passage was cut through the snow walls so that pedestrians could cross the street. The pavement on the streets and the cement on the sidewalks could not be seen all winter long as they had a two-inch thick covering of hard ice and snow packed on top. Only by May was the packed ice broken up, melted, and cleared away.

Many houses were heated with coal, as was ours on Main Street. Our house had been built in 1880 and had a central coal furnace. This meant that the downstairs was very warm but the upstairs was usually freezing cold in the winter. I slept



Weston Theatre, c. 1945. This building stood on the west side of Main street between the Masonic Temple and Cruickshank's Garage. It was at this point that the northern street car service reverted from double to single track.



This early image of Weston Town Hall shows the drinking fountain that was a favourite with thirsty children.

upstairs with an oil burner beside my bed, a rather dangerous practice given the fire risk (though nothing ever happened).

We had our milk delivered to the house. My mother put a small cardboard sign in the front window when she wanted the milkman to stop. The milk bottles were made of glass and the milk was not homogenized. It had to be shaken vigorously as the cream rose to the top. On cold mornings - those that were below freezing, which means just about any day in winter - the milk sitting outside would freeze and expand and the frozen milk would rise straight out of the neck of the bottle with the cardboard cap still sitting on the top. Milk rising two inches out of the bottle was not uncommon, but I can remember the frozen milk sometimes rising as much as four or five inches out of the bottle. It looked funny at first glance.

At the north end of Weston, before reaching the railroad overpass and on the left side, was St Phillips Road. It was very narrow, hardly paved, and barely the width of two cars. This road led down to the bridge which the locals called the White Bridge. It acquired this name because in the sunlight, its concrete gleamed pure white. After crossing the White Bridge, the road to St. Phillips Church and beyond was again very narrow and barely paved. Fields were located on both sides of the road with an occasional barn coming into view. There were no houses that I recall anywhere to be seen along this stretch.

Most winters, my Sunday school class at Central United Church arranged a sleigh ride for all, and this was anticipated with much glee. One of the church members



A postcard image of Central United Church, at the corner of Main and King Streets, c.1930.

had a large wooden wagon that had the wheels removed and replaced with skids and this turned it into a wonderful sleigh. The sleigh was piled high with hay and

the two horses in front each had bells on their harnesses. It was perfect! A dozen kids would pile into the converted wagon and the ride would begin. Those evening rides were very special. The black sky would twinkle with a thousand tiny lights while the horse bells were jingling. It seemed magical! The country roads all had a packed ice-snow covering so that the sleigh slid along smoothly. Sometimes we would sing Christmas carols or other songs, and other times we would jump off the back of the sleigh and run behind it. After two hours of this activity, we were ready to go back to the church for hot cocoa and rest. The driver would be paid \$15 for his time and effort, and this was considered a very good payment at that time.

We looked forward to the weekends and the arrival of the Toronto Star. The kids all wanted the comic section, especially because it featured Flash Gordon on the cover page. He was my favorite too and I could hardly wait for Sunday in order to read about the latest intergalactic adventure.

By the way, doctors did make house calls in those days. The charge ran between \$6 and \$8 for each home visit.



Jean Gove-Carbone, shown here beside the Humber River (at age 11), is the youngest daughter of Ida and James Gilbert Gove. In October 2009, Heritage Toronto memorialized James Gove's contribution to Weston with a commemorative plaque, which was placed in Little Avenue Memorial Park. From 1930 to about 1960, Mr. Gove, a master stonemason, built Weston's distinctive Humberstone walls and beautiful memorial Cenotaph.